Panther Homicide Charges

14 Chicago Police, DA Cleared?

CHICAGO — (CST) — A special county grand jury has cleared 14 policemen of all homicide charges in the killing of two Black Panther Party leaders, it was learned today from law-enforcement sources.

The same grand jury accused eight of the policemen, state's attorney Edward Hanrahan and five other persons of criminal conspiracy to obstruct justice in the case.

The homicide clearance reportedly is contained in one of four No Bills voted by the jury, along with the conspiracy indictment.

(A No Bill is a document in which grand jurors report that there is insufficient evidence on which to indict a person or persons on a specific criminal charge.)

The No Bills have been kept secret on a decision July 30 by Chief Criminal Judge Joseph Power when he refused to make them a part of the court record.

Defense attorneys are expected to ask at a court hearing tomorrow that the homicide-clearance documents be made public without further delay.

Legal authorities pointed out that special prosecutor Barnabas Sears is in no position to object, since it was he and his staff who originally tendered the No Bills to Judge Power.

Sears said yesterday that he was unable to comment on the latest development, supposedly since prosecutors are restrained from making any remarks that might prejudice rights of defendants to fair trial.

The indictment is an outgrowth of a 1969 police raid on a West Side apartment in which Black Panther Party leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark were shot to death.

The indictment accuses the defendants of obstructing justice by using fake evidence and false testimony in trying to prevent criminal prosecution of eight policemen who took part in the raid.

Hanrahan already has set forth the proposition that the policemen could not have been prosecuted since the Sears grand jury presumably cleared them of any homicidal misconduct. It is Sears' position, however, that the defendants still were guilty of conspiracy, regardless of the success of purported attempts to obstruct justice.

Making public of the No Bills also is expected to provide an answer to Panther Party leaders, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, national director of Operation Breadbasket, and others who have asked that the conspiracy defendants be prosecuted for murder.

The No Bills presumably clear the defendants of any such charges as murder, voluntary manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, battery and assault.